

## Cheering crowd greets ex-prisoner

### Freed after 27 years, hero gets a raucous airport welcome

By FRANK BURGOS

Chanting "Viva Roberto," a wildly enthusiastic crowd of more than 500 greeted Roberto Martin Perez Rodriguez, Cuba's longest serving political prisoner, at Miami International Airport Saturday evening.

After spending 27 years in prison, Perez Rodriguez was freed Friday after a request for his release from the chief of Panama's defense forces, Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega. An impassioned letter from Perez Rodriguez's 84-year-old mother, who lives in Miami, convinced Noriega to help.

Perez Rodriguez arrived on a 5:30 p.m. flight from Panama, where he had been taken after his release from the Combinado del Este prison in Cuba. As soon as he passed Customs, he was met by a phalanx of reporters, cameras and well-wishers. His white guayabera was soon stained with pink lipstick from the kisses of relatives and friends, and he was clearly overwhelmed by the welcome, which almost approached riot conditions.

At first the crowd reluctantly cooperated with airport officials and moved behind purple barriers which separated the Customs exit from the rest of the airport terminal. "Until

everybody moves back, he's not coming out," warned Metro-Dade terminal operations specialist Jesus Hernandez.

But once Perez Rodriguez appeared, decorum was pushed aside by joyful emotion.

Metro-Dade police tried in vain to move the crowd back, as people jostled to get closer to the freed prisoner. Almost all tried to touch him, rubbing his bald head in unrepressed affection. For the entire time he was at the airport, someone was hugging or holding him.

"Nobody can be bigger than he is at the

Please turn to PRISONER/8B



MARICE COHN BAND / Miami Herald Staff  
Freed prisoner Roberto Martin Perez Rodriguez, left, arrived to a tumultuous welcome.



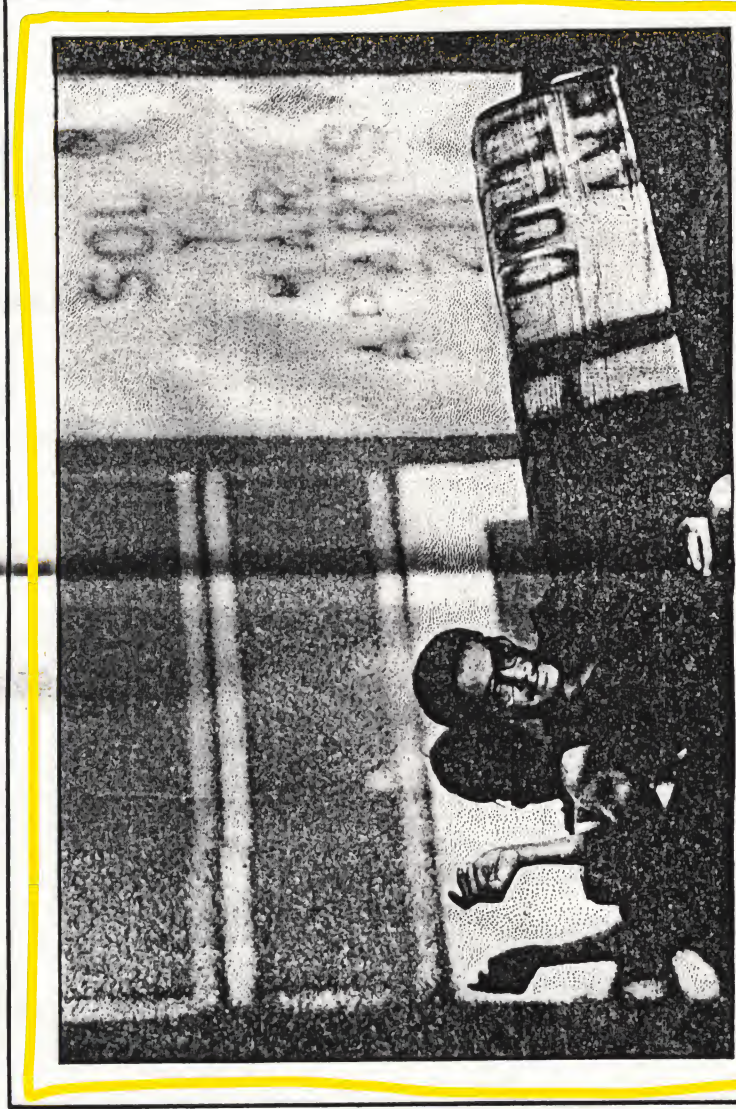
Charles Whited

## Broke ex-wife relies on friends for food, shelter

**Sidelights of a City:**  
"I have my back against the wall with no place to turn."  
The fancy life she knew, with the house at Bay Point, the cook, the governess, the new Caddy every year, the Surf Club cabana, are gone now.

Barbara's broke.  
She lives by the charity of women friends, sleeping on their couches, a few days here and a few days there. Her youngest daughter, 16, is out in the city somewhere, a high school dropout working in a sandwich shop. "I don't know where she is staying. With some of her friends. I don't know." Clearly, she doesn't like to think about it.

Though still an attractive blond at 44, Barbara lives with one purpose in mind now: to make her wealthy ex-husband pay what the courts have ruled that he owes her, which is \$1,200 a month



BRIAN SMITH / Miami Herald Staff

AT HOME ON THE BEACH Jose Hernandez sits in the lobby of apartment house

## Young kids learn Spanish by immersion

Broward's approach / 5B

By CATHY SHAW

**Herald Staff Writer**  
For adventures in Spanish, try the third- and fourth-graders at Sabal Palm Elementary School.

"My next-door neighbor is Spanish, and I can talk to him," said Timothy Elsing, 9.

"I'm teaching my mother," said Melissa Zelniker, 9.

"Well, we went to the flea market to buy a present for my friend and the guy was selling shoes and he only spoke Spanish," said Marisa Chapkanov, 8. "So I had to tell him Size 7 in Spanish, so we got the right size."

Sabal Palm's Principal Gertrude Edelman says she got the right program at the right time: Spanish immersion for kindergarten students, beginning five years ago. Now, those same students are in fourth grade, and they speak Spanish.



# Area becomes a waiting room for the poor

BEACH / from 1B

Hispanics moving to South Beach, sees it differently. "It's not discrimination on either side," said Coto, 81. "They have their culture, which is different than ours. They have their social groups, and we have ours."

Young families, once the exception, have brought new life to neighborhoods.

"I was driving down there the other day," said Don Flachmeier, director of community services for Lutheran Ministries. "On the same streets that five years ago used to be filled with elderly, people with walkers moving slowly, I saw kids on Big Wheels."

The signs of change are everywhere:

- South Beach Elementary, closed eight years ago because of low enrollment, is expected to reopen in 1989 to relieve overcrowding at Fisher and Fienberg elementary schools.

- A new class of retirees, Latins from across Dade and across the country, is calling South Beach home. They move here for the same reasons that drew another group of immigrants decades ago — to retire in the sunshine among their own kind.

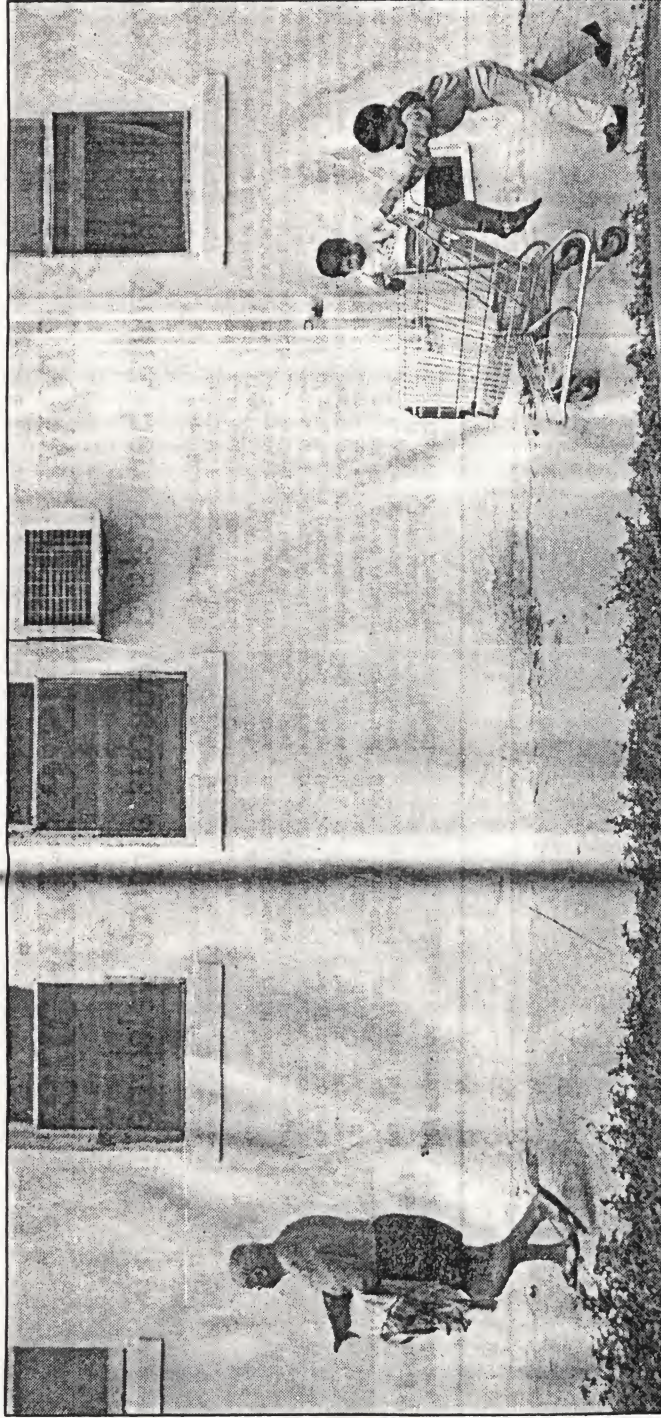
Elderly Hispanics now make up 60 percent of residents who get federal rent subsidies on South Beach. The Little Havana Activities Center opened a branch on South Beach 2½ years ago to provide recreation and Cuban food. It serves 180 people a day, turning away many.

- The Jewish Community Center/Senior Center started offering a Spanish class for its members two years ago. The center added a second class this year. Director Yvonne Lee is planning programs to draw elderly Latins as well as elderly Jews.

- The Stanley Myers Community Health Center, established as a geriatric center nine years ago, now dispenses medicine for head lice and diaper rash. Just last year, the center began offering AIDS testing. Ninety-two percent of its clients are in their 20s and 30s. Most are Latin.

Nine years ago, when the Stanley Myers center opened, 98 percent of the clients were elderly and Jewish. Thousands were retired Jewish garment workers from New York, Eastern European immigrants who fled first Hitler and later the northern winters.

"My great-grandfather came from



BRIAN SMITH / Miami Herald Staff

South Beach has become a mix of young refugees and elderly retirees. As an elderly man passes, Frank Virella, 6, pushes his brother Heraldo, 4, along Second Street.

## She survives, but little else does

By GELAREH ASAYESH  
Herald Staff Writer

Almost a century of living has shorn Bertha Wurtzel of expectation. At 91, she is grateful for the small things.

She has a nice apartment on South Beach, a good social worker and \$82 a week to live on. Her son visits each year.

Once, Wurtzel was one of many, part of a wave of Eastern European Jewish immigrants who settled on South Beach and made it theirs. Today, she is one of a few, a solitary survivor of bygone days.

When Wurtzel steps out on her little balcony, the alleyway below is filled with laughter, children crying and Spanish voices. Everywhere are signs of a different South Beach.

"I don't speak the language my neighbors speak," says Wurtzel. "But I keep myself busy. In the mornings I straighten up. And in the afternoons I watch my stories on TV."

snatch three years ago, had only a few dollars in her pocketbook.

She was born in New York City, the Jewish daughter of a Polish-Austrian couple. Her husband was a garment worker from New York's Lower East Side. She moved to South Beach in 1960.

Now and then, there are memories of a time when there was more to life.

She had a neighbor, Joseph Siegel. When she fell and broke her wrist, he shopped for her and kept her company.

"He went to the veterans nursing home," said Wurtzel. "When he didn't feel good, at first I went to see him. He didn't recognize me."

"We used to go dancing at Sixth Street," she says, her face losing its serenity. "I hope he's still alive. I want to feel that he's still alive, but I know he's not."

She's already made her application to a



BRIAN SMITH / Miami Herald Staff



buildings have been closed in the past 18.